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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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* *Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of May 25, 1942*
† *"The Strings, My Lord, Are False" opened Tuesday, May 19th, at the Royale Theatre.*
† *"Uncle Harry" opened Wednesday, May 20th, at the Broadhurst Theatre.*

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Uncle Harry"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
May 21, 1942

Eva Le Gallienne Returns In a Murder Mystery

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WE HAVE all been brought up to believe quite confidently that murder will out. And murder would have out in Uncle Harry's case, if only he had not been known for years as so meek and kind a fellow. This is Thomas Job's point in the melodrama which arrived at the Broadhurst last evening and to which the crafty Uncle Harry has given his name. Make no mistake about it, Uncle Harry as Mr. Job has conceived him is a crafty fellow. He commits the perfect crime; a crime so perfect that even when he wants to persuade people of his guilt he can get no one to believe him.

Uncle Harry has his reasons which lead him, as they might have led many another and milder man, to murder. He lives with his two unmarried sisters. They not only spoil him but because of him they are always spoiling for a fight with one another. They are as jealous of him as they are jealous of the girl Uncle Harry is in love with. He sees all this plainly (as so do we all) when in his home he meets the sisterless man his girl has decided to marry. Then Uncle Harry, who hitherto has been constructive in his gentleness, suddenly puts his meekness to destructive uses.

• • •

Far be it from me to give away the intricate method Uncle Harry employs to erase one quarrelsome sister and have the other accused of her murder. Suffice it to say that it works. And that Uncle Harry, whose last name is Quincey and who thinks his family may have been related to the great De Quincey, established by his fiendish ingenuity proofs of consanguinity with the author of Murder Considered as a Fine Art.

As Mr. Job spins his spider's web, Uncle Harry's "perfect crime" is well-contrived and moderately good fun to watch when put into operation. It would be far more fun if only Mr. Job did not keep his play moving so slowly; if only some judicious cuts were made in what at present are scenes of pure teasing; and if only Mr. Job did not cheat psychologically when hard pushed to stretch his incidents.

Adding to the interest of an over-leisurely script, which for first-rate spine-twisting suffers too much from Uncle Harry's own meekness, is the skill Mr. Job shows in the writing of stray episodes, the adriotness of his plotting, and, above all, the acting. In Howard Bay's excellent settings Leona Roberts is amusing as an old family retainer. Adelaide Klein, who was so admirable as the candy store proprietess in Brooklyn, U. S. A., is expert as the formidable older sister. And Miss Le Gallienne and Mr. Schildkraut, as the younger sister and Uncle Harry, both contribute performances of unusual dexterity and authority.

• • •

It is good to have Miss Le Gallienne back. And she plays Lettie with power, charm and gaiety. Although Mr. Schildkraut's presence in the Quincey household suggests a scandal unhinted at in the text, he acts brilliantly, with a nice eye for characterizing values and a relish for effects. All in all, the evening is a pretty good one, and would be much better if only it moved more swiftly. Certainly Uncle Harry is better than most of the stuff seen hereabouts of recent months which, though not saying much, still seems worth the saying.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
May 21, 1942

A Perfect Crime Has Dire Results

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN *Uncle Harry* it takes the jury only a few minutes to convict Lottie Quincy of murder. A jury sitting in judgment on the play itself needs to deliberate a little longer, however, for of Thomas Job's sardonic psychological thriller there is indeed much to be said on both sides. The plot is interesting, but over-extended. The characters are interesting, but rather inconsistent. The author has the virtue of relentlessness, but pushes it so far that it becomes a fault—and a trick. The writing is skilful, but the construction is clumsy. The play never falls to pieces, but it never forms a harmonious whole. If all this backing and filling confuse you, blame Mr. Job, not me. The truth is, I think, that, critically, *Uncle Harry* is open to serious objections, and in terms of what it could have been is a disappointment. Yet, for all its faults, one is seldom bored and often absorbed by it; and with Joseph Schildkraut exhibiting considerable skill in the title role, and Eva Le Gallienne giving her most effective performance in years, *Uncle Harry* is enjoyable theatregoing.

Uncle Harry is the story of a man who commits a perfect crime—of a mild, meek bachelor who lives with two maiden sisters who spoil him and quarrel over him, but also bust up his romance and make his life a hell. Beneath his mildness there exist—or are generated by his damnable home life—the cunning and hypocrisy of a Tartuffe; and he quite brilliantly schemes to get rid of both his sisters by having one of them poisoned, and the other convicted of the crime.

All this provides a compact and often exciting drama, with skilful characterizations and considerable suspense. But Mr. Job refuses to rest there; he aims higher. *Uncle Harry* soon becomes not just the story of a man who commits a perfect crime, but the story of one who finds that it does him no good. For the girl won't marry him after all, and people shie away from the brother of a poisoner. This is sardonic twist No. 1; and twist enough, I think, to end the play. But Mr. Job goes on to contrive a second sardonic twist, and yet a third: neither Harry nor the audience is left off lightly. Whether Mr. Job created all these twists because his pleasure in irony is insatiable, or because he otherwise would not have had a third act, I cannot say; but they spoil, as it were, a good letter with too many postscripts. Mr. Job is a better hand at crime than he is at punishment.

Lem Ward's direction is not always well paced, but the supporting cast is on the whole a very capable one. Adelaide Klein, Beverly Roberts and Leona Roberts are particularly helpful.

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Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

"Uncle Harry"

NEW YORK SUN
May 21, 1942

'Uncle Harry,' Ingenious Murder Drama, Is Offered At the Broadhurst

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

AN admirably sinister murder play, slightly diabolical in its ingenuity and warranted to make the timid look hereafter with uneasy suspicion on all quiet little men, was ushered into the Broadhurst Theater last evening. Thomas Job, its author, calls it "Uncle Harry," and the homely understatement of the title is of a piece with Mr. Job's rather stealthy subtlety. Connoisseurs of polite violence will find it all very gratifying.

Mr. Job keeps no major secrets, and needs to keep none. In a prologue a slight, meek man fixes a wandering drummer with an eye which does not perceptibly glitter and begins to tell him a story of murder. The meek man introduces himself politely as a Mr. Harry Quincey. He adds, casually, that he is, although he can get no one to believe it, an embarrassingly successful murderer. He would like to tell the squirming salesman about it, and as time goes on he does.

With the startled auditor, we return to the scene. Sometime in 1909 it was, and apparently somewhere in Canada. It was in a small town, in a small town house, and Harry lived there with his two sisters and an old ailing dog and a comfortable serving woman. Everybody thought that Harry was almost saintly in his forbearance and in evidence of their deprecatory friendship all called him "Uncle" Harry. Even the girl he wanted to marry did that; even his quarreling sisters sometimes did. And so Harry decided upon murder.

Whom he murdered, how he utilized the human materials at hand, bending each circumstance a little to his purpose but really making nothing up, shading the truth only a trifle here and emphasizing it just perceptibly there—all this I would not dream of telling you. Nor can you learn in these columns what strange thing happened at the end to send him out, finally, button-holing strangers with his story and scaring barmaids into fits by his mere presence. About such matters, all so ingeniously revealed by Mr. Job, you will want to find out for yourselves.

You may, however, know that Joseph Schildkraut is a finely sinister murderer, all the more sinister for seeming so meek and mild and run down at the heels. Eva Le Gallienne is one of the sisters. She is always good and at the end, when she makes a situation which might arouse skepticism into something rather horribly believable, she gives a really notable performance. Adelaide Klein, Wauna Paul, Guy Sampsel, A. P. Kaye and the others are good, too.

Just about what the medical examiner ordered, "Uncle Harry" is.

'UNCLE HARRY'

A play in three acts by Thomas Job; staged by Lem Ward; settings by Howard Bay; costumes by Peggy Clark; presented at the Broadhurst Theater on May 20, 1942, by Clifford Hayman in association with Lennie Hatten. The cast:

Miss Phipps	Wauna Paul
Mr. Jenkins	Guy Sampsel
A Man	Joseph Schildkraut
Hester	Adelaide Klein
Lettie	Eva Le Gallienne
Lucy	Beverly Roberts
Nona	Leona Roberts
George Waddy	Stephen Chase
D'Arcy	John McGovern
Albert	A. P. Kaye
Blake	Ralph Theadore
Ben	Karl Malden
The Governor	Colville Dunn
Mr. Burton	Bruce Adams
Matron	Isabel Arden

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
May 21, 1942

'Uncle Harry' Opens At the Broadhurst

Eva Le Gallienne and Joseph Schildkraut Teamed in Homicidal Play

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH "Uncle Harry" is not as happily homicidal as "Arsenic and Old Lace" nor as congealing to the marrow as "Angel Street" it revealed a number of virtues at the Broadhurst last night and provided a moderately engrossing evening of skillful assassination and similar Broadway pastimes.

It is adroitly written by Thomas Job, sometime Yale professor and dramatizer of "Barchester Towers" and it brings back to our stage under lethal circumstances the admirable playing team of Eva Le Gallienne and Joseph Schildkraut. As brother and sister in a family trio of fierce hatreds and quiet Borgia-work the two stars lash themselves and play into quite a lather from time to time and make its best moments very good indeed.

There is a special difficulty, but also a special reward when the author takes the audience into his confidence and lets the customers see every move in a murder plot. The problem is even tougher when the author shows his murderer committing the perfect crime, a bumping off so slyly done that no one will believe the murderer guilty even when he writes down a carefully detailed confession.

Uncle Harry committed such a murder using his sister Hettie, a hateful old belligerent, as his most acceptable victim and throwing the suspicion on his equally rancid sister Lettie, thereby edging Lettie to the gallows. Hettie and Lettie loved Harry with the possessive spinsterish love which upset Harry's marriage, ruined his life, and finally tempted him to trick Sister Lettie into giving old Het a slug of cocoa with poison enough in it to wipe out, as they said, a regiment.

Hettie's Wail

It wiped out Hettie all right, all right, for she let out a wail that probably made people four blocks away think that either "Helzapoppin" or an air raid had hit the town. After that all Harry had to do was sit around and watch his carefully laid clues envelop poor Lettie in a hopeless mass of guilty-looking facts neatly contrived to fix her too, but at the State's expense. Oh, Harry hated them with complete and overtime hatred.

Prof. Job is exceedingly clever in setting up the motives and the details of the crime, and shrewd enough in writing his characters to raise the tension of a quarrelsome household to murder pitch. It is in the resolution of his tale that he begins to falter, and though the last strange scene of a viciously inverted revenge is done superbly by Miss Le Gallienne, showing sister Lettie refusing Harry even the meagre comfort of the gallows, it leaves the play at as loose an end as it leaves Lettie.

Malevolent Prank

It is as if the perfect crime had turned into a monstrous and wryly malevolent prank against its own perpetrator, which is good sense and good morality, but not very good theatre. Prof. Job has created such valid characters that he is unwilling to subject them to the melodramatic climax his play obviously needs to clinch its stage excitement. Yet his play is so carefully and obviously contrived that it's a pity he doesn't quite reap the rewards of his adroitness.

While Mr. Schildkraut scarcely looks the meek and apron-tied brother of two bickering sisters, all Canadians, he gives an excellent performance, not quite calm enough in its quiet moments, but vivid in action and enormously resourceful.

In the festering final scene both he and Miss Le Gallienne perform wonders with twisted emotion to create the bitterest anguish of frustration and despair.

Before Hettie takes the fatal cocoa she is admirably played by Adelaide Klein and there are helpful smaller performances by Beverly Roberts, Leona Roberts, and Stephen Chase. Lem Ward's direction is scrupulous and forceful, and Howard Bay's three settings swiftly changeable and highly effective.

NEW YORK TIMES
May 21, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

Murder Mystery, 'Uncle Harry,' Has Premiere at Broadhurst — Joseph Schildkraut and Eva Le Gallienne Are Starred

ANOTHER murderer is walking these dim old streets, murmuring of prison and of blood, of justice and the pasty-faced hangman's curving noose. Even before the town was darkened because of gentlemen of force residing elsewhere Broadway had its crimes of character—Boris Karloff and the Sisters Brewster with their neat line of corpses for "Arsenic and Old Lace," and Vincent Price and "Angel Street." But last night, when the gloom of the once roaring Forties was practically complete, they brought along Joseph Schildkraut and a play called "Uncle Harry," and as of that moment theatre-going in darkness became a mentally hazardous occupation. That Schildkraut: a Karloff in disguise, a Karloff with a few more assorted aberrations.

The new occupant of the Broadhurst has been kicking around for several years; it is the work of Thomas Job of New Haven and "Barchester Towers," and it shows a mind that is agile in creating this sort of thing. It has pleased Mr. Job to place in a small town in 1909 one Uncle Harry, who outwardly is the soul of gentleness and consideration, but who inwardly seethes with an idea or two of his own. Uncle Harry wishes to live a certain life, and so he plans the perfect crime, and, since Mr. Job is in charge, that is what he gets. Of cause and effect, the method and crime and punishment, deponent doesn't say; sufficient for the moment that there is Schildkraut the sinister.

* * *

There is more, too, for the Messrs. Clifford Hayman and Lennie Hatten, who are producers of record, have acquired Eva Le Gallienne, Leona Roberts, A. P. Kaye, Adelaide Klein, for their little exhibition of homicide. A far cry from "Liliom" and "Romeo and Juliet," you will say, and what are Mr. Schildkraut and Miss Le Gallienne—partners usually in the higher forms of art—doing here? Having fun, probably. For while Mr. Schildkraut is giving the leading character every touch possible from a particularly good actor, Miss Le Gallienne is in there sending them along waist high, across the plate, and fast. A team.

Miss Le Gallienne is one of the unhappy Harry's sisters, since in murder plays the leading characters have sisters, the world being curiously dominated by domineering women. She is harsh and gentle by turns, she lowers her voice and raises it, she has perfect timing. Miss Klein is the other sister, and she, too, knows her way around the dark and lengthy sides of melodrama. The other players likewise know, and so did Lem Ward, who directed, and Howard Bay, who designed one of those 1909 rooms where anything can happen and usually a murder or two does, finally.

But Mr. Schildkraut—there obviously is a dangerous man. Keep well behind him, especially these dim nights.

L. N.

"Uncle Harry"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
May 21, 1942

Perfect Crime

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THERE is nothing like a good murder, or two to enliven the closing days of a drama season. In the new play, rather placidly known as "Uncle Harry," Thomas Job, who was not very successful several years ago in his dramatization of "Barchester Towers," proves himself more adept at the specialized business of theatrical homicide by giving us an entertaining and ingenious variation of "the perfect crime." This is the whimsical tale of a kindly and benevolent gentleman who manages to arrange the slaughter of his disagreeable sisters and then gets no fun out of it. With Miss Eva Le Gallienne giving her best local performance since the days of "Liliom," and Joseph Schildkraut offering a mechanically efficient portrayal in the title role, this "Uncle Harry" is an agreeably effective melodrama, worthy of recommendation to sensible murder-story addicts.

* * *

This Uncle Harry is a mild and placid young man who is bullied by his sisters, jilted by his sweetheart and patronizingly liked by his neighbors. Every one thinks he is an admirable fellow, but there is a certain scorn mingled with the approval, because there is something timid and spineless about everything he does. In truth, the real indication of what his home town thinks of Harry is that, despite his comparative youth, every one speaks of him as "Uncle." For all his meekness, however, there is the quality of the turning worm in him, and a murderous spirit is concealed by his friendly mask. So, when his unpleasant sisters, Lettie and Hester, push him too far, Harry arranges an ingenious vengeance, and his crimes are so skillfully managed that no breath of suspicion is raised against him. That, in fact, is the only trouble. For when Harry wants to confess no one will believe him.

* * *

Perhaps all of this seems to be giving away more than is ethical about a melodrama dealing with assassination. But "Uncle Harry" belongs to the currently popular dispensation, wherein the author makes no effort to conceal the identity of his killer from future audiences. The interest and the suspense in Mr. Job's play lie in the manner in which things are carried off and the psychological problems brought out by the narrative. You know pretty much from the start what will happen to Harry's demoniacal scheming, and even though in the end there is no great twist of plot to bring about a surprise conclusion the finish of the Milquetoast-like murderer has a credible and effective quality of poetic justice that is shrewdly managed. "Uncle Harry" hasn't the superb quality of suspense that "Angel Street" offers, but it is taut and effective for all that, and provides an entertaining evening.

* * *

It strikes me that "Uncle Harry" would be a more powerful thriller if Mr. Schildkraut, instead of being satisfied to offer merely a competent performance, had provided the kind of brilliant and terrifying portrayal of pathological crime that Vincent Price, for example, offers in the aforementioned "Angel Street." Mr. Schildkraut is good, but not quite chilling enough about his deceptively amiable massacres. On the other hand, Miss Le Gallienne's constrained style of acting fits in splendidly with the part of the slaughtered sister who finally has her own subtle vengeance. It is an impressive performance in every way, adding tremendously to the spell and mood of the play. In the small role of the sweetheart who understandably drops Uncle Harry, Miss Beverly Roberts indicates, as she did in "Heart of a City," that she is an actress worthy of attention. "Uncle Harry" is good murderous entertainment, shrewdly manipulated.

NEW YORK POST
May 21, 1942

Joseph Schildkraut and Eva Le Gallienne in "Uncle Harry"

By WILELLA WALDORF

MORE often than not, the famous criminal cases chronicled by Edmund Pearson, William Roughead, Alexander Woollcott and other connoisseurs of murder as a fine art are period pieces. The characters are seldom dressed in modern clothes.

The present-day gangster mows down his enemies with a machine gun, or if he is sufficiently eminent, hires a "torpedo" to do it for him. The killing is accomplished in a second or two, nobody cares much who was done in, or why, and the incident is apt to be forgotten as soon as the police have cleared away the bodies. It may be murder, but is it art?

In the old days, celebrated criminals whose exploits have gone down in history planned their nefarious deeds with extreme care, went about the precarious business with deliberation, and expended considerable cerebral energy in the process. Murder was an intellectual problem faultlessly solved by a first-class brain, not a street massacre carried out by a gang of thugs with no I. Q. worth registering.

Murder As a Fine Art

Thomas Job takes the professorial approach to crime. His new play, "Uncle Harry," produced last night at the Broadhurst Theatre, is a literate chronicle for connoisseurs. It is laid in a small town, presumably in Canada, during the period 1909-12. Deliberately paced, its leading character is carefully developed, and the plot is rounded off with an interestingly ironic ending.

Whether or not Mr. Job based his drama on an actual murder case of the past we do not know, but the story told in "Uncle Harry" might very well be a true one.

It is not fair to future audiences to reveal much about the plot beyond the fact that it concerns Harry Quincy, a meek, harmless sort of fellow who leads a nerve-wracking life with two trying old-maid sisters who lavish attention on him, and are constantly bickering with each other. After committing a well-planned, "perfect" murder, he finally decides to confess, but nobody will believe him. And the surviving sister, Lettie, knows how to deal out a revenge that is worse than death.

The Intellectual Approach

Joseph Schildkraut gives a quiet, thoughtfully detailed performance as Uncle Harry, seldom raising his voice, but often succeeding in giving the audience the creeps as he quietly carries out his deadly plan involving prussic acid and an ailing dog.

Eva Le Gallienne, his co-star, is equally impressive as Sister Lettie who fails to see what he is up to until it is too late—but not too late to get her revenge. Miss Le Gallienne and Mr. Schildkraut have acted together many times before, in "Liliom" and other plays. They are well cast in "Uncle Harry" and know what they are about in a drama that calls for the intellectual approach.

The cast in general performs well under Lem Ward's realistic direction, with Adelaide Klein, Beverly Roberts, Leona Roberts, Stephen Chase, A. P. Kaye, Karl Maldon and Ralph Theadore all helping to achieve the proper atmosphere. Howard Bay's three settings are in the mood.

"Uncle Harry" will not appeal to thrill addicts who insist upon shots ringing out every other minute, and bodies galore, but it should please theatre-goers who have enjoyed "Angel Street" and the more literate thrillers of that admirable school.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
May 21, 1942

'Uncle Harry' Is a Crime Play Proving Murder Won't Out

"Uncle Harry," drama by Thomas Job. Produced by Clifford Hayman and Lennie Hatten at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, May 20, 1942.

★ ★ ★—

By BURNS MANTLE

THOMAS Job is writing of another of those perfect crimes in "Uncle Harry," which opened at the Broadhurst last night, and it is pleasant to report that he has made a thoroughly workmanlike job of it. Liking perfect crime dramas, this is an item that should interest you.

In this instance the playwright deliberately sets aside any attempt to build suspense in his drama by permitting his murderer to confess his crime in a prologue.

And then he successfully proves his own craft by proving that despite that confession he can hold the interest of his audience the evening through.

Of course he goes back to the origin of the murderer's determination to be rid of his victim. She is a sister in this instance—a too loving sister.

Sister Trouble

There are two of these sisters, and if the object of their possessiveness can be rid of one of them he will not only be much happier, he believes, but will be able to recover a sweetheart who has been discouraged about marrying him because of his family's hold upon him.

If he can do away with one, and fasten the crime on the other, he will be rid of both of them, and thereafter be an entirely free man.

This plot is a little on the deliberately theatrical side, as you may see. And a shade too slowly played by Lem Ward's direction. But it provides a holding and well acted drama for all that.

Audience interest is gained through the artful, if occasionally obvious, contriving of the circumstantial evidence that shall free the murderer once the ferrets of the law are put on the case.

Good Support

Audience interest is sustained, also, by the excellent acting of Eva Le Gallienne and Joseph Schildkraut in the leading roles, and by the recovery of that carefully detailed type of production that gave character and standing to Miss Le Gallienne's productions at the Civic Repertory theatre 16 years ago.

Le Gallienne and Schildkraut play well together whenever they have characters worthy their study. "Uncle Harry" offers them their most grateful opportunities in a new play since they were together in "Liliom."

Their support has also been well chosen, with Beverly Roberts playing the sought-for sweetheart, Adelaide Klein the hated sister and Leona Roberts one of those minor character etchings that made her a favorite in the old days.

Howard Bay settings on a turntable stage are practical and attractive, and Mr. Ward's direction, save for the tendency to let his actors loiter, is splendidly thorough.

The reunion of Miss Le Gallienne and Mr. Schildkraut in this new enterprise, to be offered at a reasonable tariff, may result in a revival of of the spirit if not the career of the old Civic Repertory, and that I think would be fine for the theatre.

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
May 20, 1942

Paul Vincent Carroll Writes a War Play

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IN The Strings, My Lord, Are False Paul Vincent Carroll has written a war play which, instead of taking its place proudly among such admirable examples of Mr. Carroll's skill as The White Steed and Shadow and Substance, belongs, I regret to state, on the same lower shelf with his The Old Foolishness and Kindred.

It is a strange play, this melodrama which was given such a populous but empty production at the Royale last night. It represents a mixture of The Wookey, An Enemy of the People and The Lower Depths, with dashes of Clifford Odets, Channing Pollock and Mr. Carroll thrown in, which is neither palatable nor stimulating.

There are moments, of course, when one responds (as who can help responding?) to the wholesale picture of human misery during a bombing which Mr. Carroll presents. But for such occasional responses the war must be blamed rather than Mr. Carroll praised. Verbally he tries to play an Irish harp against the bagpipes of war-torn Scotland. And the music does not blend.

Mr. Carroll's scene is Port Monica, one of the steel towns in the Firth of Clyde, which suffered cruelly at the hands of German aviators in the spring of 1941. As the play is Mr. Carroll's, the hero (at least the hero in the script) of The Strings, My Lord, Are False is a Catholic canon; a man, warm of heart and temper, who is the bulwark of his fellow citizens at the moment of their testing. He is a brave man, this canon, not given to diplomacy, fond of good liquor, properly scandalized by municipal corruption and devoted to the interests of the people. He knows, so far as this civilization is concerned, that in Shakespeare's words the strings are false. The hope of a better world to come after the war is what gives him the courage to face the German bombings, to refuse to be sent back to the Ireland he dearly loves and to combat the evil ones in local politics who have added to the sufferings of his flock.

There is very little that Mr. Carroll has left out of his drama. All the regulation "cross-section" characters are present, doing all the regulation "cross-section" things. It is not their fault if in their grief they are given no more room in which to move around than if they were so many strap-hangers during a subway rush hour. The families that have just had their homes bombed, the woman who is about to have a baby and proceeds to have it, the girl who is carrying a child she does not want, the Communist and his free-thinking little daughter, the reformed prostitute who can function as a midwife, the villainous politico, the virtuous air-raid warden, the Jewish refugee, the pacifist and the religious fanatic—they all of them are on hand, either in the canon's study or in the cathedral's crypt. It is no fault of theirs if they resemble electric-light bulbs on a sight blacked out for the duration.

Part of the trouble is Mr. Carroll's and part of it is the present production's. When he is not indulging in overblown cadences and deliberate sentimentalities, Mr. Carroll is trying to paint a panorama with the finest camel's hair brush. His usual eloquence is lacking, and in its place he offers a great deal of fustian. Only occasionally do reminders of his skill intrude.

Even these are forced to lurk behind the smoke-screen of the present production. Elia Kazan's direction, though good at tableaux, is not so expert at turning them into living pictures. Walter Hampden spikes the canon at most turns. Ruth Gordon gives way to a regrettable stridency while trying to make too much of nothing. Colin Keith-Johnston surrenders to much face-making and heavy breathing as a virtuous Councillor. Art Smith is good as the Odetsian Communist. Margot Grahame gives much the same performance she gave in Heart of a City as the redeemed sinner. Will Lee is amusing as the refugee Jew; Philip Bourneuf, an actor, of genuine skill and versatility, is admirable as the pacifist. And the settings and lighting of Howard Bay are excellent. But the strings my lords, are false, throughout the whole of a rather dreary evening.

'THE STRINGS, MY LORD, ARE FALSE'

A play in three acts by Paul Vincent Carroll; staged by Elia Kazan; settings by Howard Bay; costumes by Paul du-Pont; presented at the Royale Theater on May 19, 1942, by Edward Choate in association with Alexander Kirkland and John Sheppard, Jr. The cast:

Alec	Ralph Cullinan
Geordie	Sherman MacGregor
Sarah	Frances Bavier
Canon Courtenay	Walter Hampden
Councillor Bill Randall	Colin Keith-Johnston
"Ma" Morrisey	Ruth Vivian
Maisie Gillespie	Constance Dowling
Jerry Hoare	Philip Bourneuf
Madge	Joan Hayden Shepard
Sadie O'Neill	Margot Grahame
Ross	John McKee
Louis Liebens	Will Lee
Iris Ryan	Ruth Gordon
Ted Bogle	Art Smith
Monseigneur Skinner	Reynolds Evans
Inspector Steele	Gordon Nelson
Councillor McPearkie	Tom Tully
Provost Grahamson	Hale Norcross
Veronica	Alice MacKenzie
A Religious Man	Hurd Hatfield
A. R. P. Messenger	Anna Minot

NEW YORK POST
May 20, 1942

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False" Opens at The Royale Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

PAUL VINCENT CARROLL, the Irish dramatist who has lived for some time in Scotland, experienced the heavy German air raids on Clydeside during the spring of '41, and survived to write a play about them. But it has neither the quality nor the eloquence of "Shadow and Substance" and "The White Steed."

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False," produced last night at the Royale Theatre, includes two uncommonly long acts plus a third much shorter, by way of epilogue. It is laid in Port Monica, one of the steel towns on the Firth of Clyde in the general vicinity of Glasgow where Canon Courtenay of St. Bride's Church maintains a Refuge Room for townspeople bombed out of their homes. The second act takes place in the crypt of the church itself, a natural air-raid shelter, until the gas mains burst and the fire comes.

The play is now running in Dublin, where it opened last March, and Mr. Carroll is said to have remarked in a curtain speech there that he deliberately toned down the horrors he had seen lest they prove too shocking to an audience in a theatre. There is, however, still plenty of death and destruction in "The Strings, My Lord, Are False," Blitzkrieg, even when toned down, is a grim business.

Down With the Profiteers

Mr. Carroll, whose interest is in the common people, is not content merely to show the fortitude, the strength and the unselfish spirit of the Scots (interspersed with a few Irish) under fire from the skies. He considers also the ruthless profiteers and crooked politicians who operate the "black market" and build air raid shelters that crumble to dust at the first detonation.

The rising wrath of the tenement dwellers against this sort of treatment, and the final realization that they are fighting a war, not only against Hitler, but also against injustice at home, is his chief concern. Even Jerry, the embittered boy who quotes "Julius Caesar" to the canon (hence the title of the play), and declines to fight to maintain things as they are, is convinced before the final curtain that a new order worth fighting for must come with the peace.

Mr. Carroll's theme is a timely one, and his picture of the Canon as an enlightened churchman refusing to kowtow to the politicians and leading the fight against the crooked councillor is well done. The play in general, however, is cluttered up with a large number of characters, some of whom are effectively and even amusingly sketched. But others are mere "types" of no particular significance, and several, in whom Mr. Carroll is obviously not even faintly interested, are stiffly and tiresomely unreal.

Hysteria and Monotony

Apparently under the impression that he had to introduce a love story whether he felt like it or not, Mr. Carroll harps monotonously on a hackneyed plot about Iris and Bill who are in love although Iris is about to have a child by another man killed in the blitz. Colin Keith-Johnston, who plays Bill, is upstanding and military in his A. R. P. uniform, which is just about all he is called upon to be, while Ruth Gordon as the girl whines dismally from her couch through most of the play, occasionally springing up to shout hysterically about her own personal woes.

Iris is the sort of general nuisance who ought to have been evacuated to a deserted quarry and left there. The part is so sketchily written that in other hands it might have been overlooked merely as one of the minor trials of a generally debilitating evening. As played by Miss Gordon in hesitant sing-song interspersed with raucous shrieks, however, it was almost as hard to bear as the German bombers.

A Medley of Accents

Among his stock figures Mr. Carroll also provides the woman of the streets with a heart of gold who turns nurse in the emergency and helps deliver a baby born to one of the townswomen in the church crypt during a raid. Margot Grahame plays her with relish, while Philip Bourneuf does well by Jerry, the boy who won't fight, and Walter Hampden acts the Canon with warmth and humor, occasionally blowing up a temper when his housekeeper hides the liquor under the sofa.

Elia Kazan's direction was deliberate and as painstaking as the play plodded on its generally uninspired way, and the company used an astounding variety of accents when it remembered to use any at all. What passed for Scottish with some of the inhabitants of Port Monica was a very curious brogue indeed. Howard Bay's setting of the church crypt was most realistic.

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
May 20, 1942

'The Strings, My Lord, Are False' Presented

Paul V. Carroll's New Play at the Royale Concerns British Reactions to War

By JOHN ANDERSON

IN HIS latest play "The Strings, My Lord, Are False," presented at the Royale last night, Paul Vincent Carroll undertakes one of the riskiest jobs a dramatist can try. He is writing about war in the midst of it, trying to interpret the present moment in terms of a bombed town on the Firth of Clyde, and turning out a muzzy-headed drama that clutters up the stage with a score or so of dull but chatty characters who explain their ideas of life and death to the accompaniment of some of the loudest acting, worst direction, and strangest off-stage noises this unhappy season has yet produced. My one hope was that the alleged air raid sounds would render the dialogue painlessly inaudible, but there was no luck. The words kept coming over.

This Mr. Carroll is the same dramatist, of course, who once wrote such distinguished plays as "Shadow and Substance" and "The White Steed," and I regret to add, such terrible pieces as "Kindred" and "The Old Foolishness."

Since Mr. Carroll is a man of perception and high principles he does address his newest play to the main subject—the faith of people in what they are fighting for. But he tackles his subject from so many angles that he merely trips himself up. The town prostitute, the town radical, the town's political bully and man of property, the town's saintly, but realistic canon, all have their say, together with a smug Monseignor, and a Jewish idealist who lost an arm at Dunkirk.

From Shakespeare

The radical says even God is a capitalistic concept; the prostitute rejoices in her newfound goodness, and a belligerent young Irishman proclaims loudly, to quote the title borrowed from Brutus' sleepy lute-player in "Julius Caesar" that the strings, my lord, are false. They are not false, answers the fighting canon, the world has let them get out of tune, and we cannot stop fighting now until they are truly pitched in faith and justice for all the noble etceteras, amen.

That is Mr. Carroll's theme and his play sticks to it, and from as many wildly jumbled directions as toothpicks in a platter of hors d'ouvres. Nowhere in it is the spiritual force of "Shadow and Substance," or the astringent humor and genial humanity of "The White Steed." The talk sounds like faded carbon copies of what inspirationalist writers expect people to say in moments of deep emotion, and it has a counterfeit ring.

"What are you thinking of," asks the canon of the rebellious Irish lad whose girl has just died in his arms.

"I am thinking of Lazarus," says the youth, with the nudging stencils of Mr. Carroll's phony uplift breaking his ribs if not his funny-bone.

Faulty Focus

But even the youth's conversion to the common cause is not focused with the sharpness of a central plot, though Philip Bourneuf's powerful and sullen performance suggests that it could easily carry it. In fact the dramatic movement is so scattered that it scarcely seems designed at all, and what we get is a series of overwritten personal comments on a war situation, with no dramatic pressure in the situation itself. It is just miscellaneous talk, big, loud and quite often irrelevant.

Under Mr. Kazan's over-anxious and overemphatic direction the performances are generally pretty bad. Even the usually impeccable Ruth Gordon is trapped into making up in sound what the part lacks in writing and significance, and Walter Hampden, possibly with a good critical eye, lets fly at the canon in the tone and manner of Bulwer-Lytton's stagiest Richelieu-loos.

In the prevalent distortion Margot Grahame's sketch of the prostitute became a lurid caricature, and Colin Keith-Johnston took such a firm grip of manly repression on himself that I feared he might clench his teeth out.

With the best written characterization of the lot Art Smith made the most of the town radical, though his performance lacked the strength and fullness of his best work.

Mr. Carroll's play, in fact, is the first indication that Shakespeare's lute-player, by crying out "The Strings, My Lord, Are False" was just having a nightmare, probably from eating too much dictionary.

NEW YORK SUN
May 20, 1942

'The Strings, My Lord, Are False' Opens at The Royale Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PAUL VINCENT CARROLL is a playwright of sensitive mind and deep sympathies and it is therefore natural that finding men and women seared by world conflagration, he should be impelled to write of their confusion and their anguish. He writes of such matters in "The Strings, My Lord, Are False," which opened last evening at the Royale Theater. And almost everything in the play proves that he has written too soon.

He has written before his impressions had stopped swirling in his head. So "The Strings, My Lord, Are False," is a swirl of events and characters, overcrowded and confused. Its writing has little perspective and none of that quiet comprehension which comes to good playwrights when they give themselves time to think. Unevenly acted at the Royale, it is a tangle of hurried plots, only very rarely catching the poignancy implicit in its picture of little people caught in the blitz raids on a small town of western Scotland. It is pathetically inadequate to what Mr. Carroll must have wanted to say.

Properly speaking, the play has no center. Somewhere near what should be the focal point, however, is a Catholic canon—one of those fine, human priests of whom Mr. Carroll loves to write. In the turmoil, Mr. Carroll even finds time to contrast him with the clergyman who gives only lip-service to religion, thus tucking in his favorite theme. But Mr. Carroll also writes of an unhappy love affair between a town councilor and a canteen driver, the reformation of a girl of the town, the reclamation of a pacifist youth, the birth of a baby in a shelter, the plot of villainous town councilors to cheat the poor and sell food on the black market, and the evident, crying need for a better world. Mr. Carroll does not find time for these things; he makes it, with a kind of desperate determination.

He also gets in what he himself, although in another connection, calls "fine words of an heroic nature." I am afraid this description is woefully accurate when applied to many of Mr. Carroll's more ambitious utterances. They are fine words, thrown about freely—thrown pretty much to the winds, where pretty much they belong. They contribute to a general impression that here is essentially naïve drama, written by a man who was thinking with his feelings and trusting that evident sincerity would take the place of craftsmanship. It doesn't in this case; it almost never does.

The many actors make startling divergent approaches to the Scotch and Irish accents indicated, and in several instances fall a good way short of intelligibility. Several of them, particularly in the earlier scenes, leap at their parts and rather worry than play them. Walter Hampden acts the role of the canon with gravity, and a good deal of unction; Colin Keith-Johnston plays a lover with detachment which sometimes amounts almost to rigidity. Art Smith gives a salty performance as the town radical, although he is hard to understand. Margot Grahame gets warmth into her playing of the reformed harlot, and Philip Bourneuf and Will Lee, although frequently up to their ears in purple patches, play interestingly. Miss Ruth Gordon, using her own methods, is, however, the only one who achieves real poignancy, the only one who really helps us glimpse the play which Mr. Carroll must have had in mind—and failed to write.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
May 20, 1942

Mr. Carroll Still Talks Too Much

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

PAUL VINCENT CARROLL was born with the Irishman's gift of words—a by no means unmixed blessing. For a time, in *Shadow and Substance* and *The White Steed*, though his thinking was not always clear, his words had sinew and strength. But since then they have consistently refused to obey him and have got completely out of hand. Both in *Kindred*, which was windy tripe, and in *The Old Foolishness*, which was mystical fudge, words were flung about, in great handfuls, with more sound than sense. And now, they are the bane, though not the only weakness, of *The Strings, My Lord, Are False*. This play, it is true, is not so fancy and flatulent and highfalutin as the ones that came before it. It is just hopelessly preachy. It is just endlessly talky. The words, like the people who utter them, are the mere banalities of a mind that has ceased to be creative.

In *The Strings, My Lord, Are False*, Mr. Carroll has abandoned his visions to face reality—to tell the story of a Scottish town during the blitz. But he has not known how to tell it—how to make it moving, or even how to make it move. In attempting to portray a whole community, he has ended up by portraying no one. His characters are at best the lean ghosts of people he has treated before, and at worst the worn stencils of uncounted generations of drama. In seeking to picture heroism, he has merely indulged in heroics. In seeking to champion the common people who bear the brunt of wars and to excoriate their betters, he has let his sympathy and his anger alike betray him. He slobbers over his warmhearted prostitute, and makes a mere stage villain of his hard-fisted councilman. His godly priest and his worldly prelate are contrasted too patly. His cynic is too bitter at the start and too easily converted at the end. And he further fills out his picture with all the commonplaces he should shun: a ruptured love affair, a comic radical, a woman who gives birth to her child while the bombs are falling.

One might put up with all this if the play were exciting. But it is drowned and deadened with talk. At the end of the second act, when the blitz reaches its full fury, and there are brilliant effects of light and darkness on the stage, there come a few moments of drama, there is something for the imagination to seize and hold. But that is about all.

Howard Bay has provided some effective sets, and Elia Kazan has given a certain order and movement to a stage overflowing with people; but most of the action is inadequate. As the priest, Walter Hampden is too stiff. In a smallish role, Ruth Gordon is half the time too shrill and the other half too casual. Most of the others are alike bogged down by their words and their accents. There are as many, and as weird, Scottish accents in *The Strings* as there were Irish ones in *The Old Foolishness*.

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
May 20, 1942

'The Strings Are False' And the Luftwaffe's Loose in Scotland

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False," drama by Paul Vincent Carroll. Produced by Edward Choate, Alexander Kirkland and John Shephard Jr., at the Royale Theatre, New York, May 19, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE bombing of Scotland, if we remember our 1941 war history, was sporadic and not too serious. But it was enough to inspire Paul Vincent Carroll to write his version of what the marauding Luftwaffe did to the bodies and souls of another such group of little people as figured last fall in "The Wookey."

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False," opening last night at the Royale, is, in fact, another "Wookey" with fewer and quieter bombs, but no more dramatic cohesion and a similar lack of story appeal.

We cannot hope to draw a real play from this war until one of the major playwrights concentrates on an adventure that is simple, direct and concerned with the more vital reactions of a few victims.

So long as they insist on trying to reproduce on their tiny stage canvases a sweeping confusion of action, and the utter bewilderment of large groups of people, all we will get is a realism that is unconvincingly realistic and human studies that are no more than bundles of makeup and muddled speech.

War in the Firth of Clyde

Mr. Carroll would tell you of the war as it hurtled into Port Monica, a steel town in West Scotland. It found another honest Carroll priest standing for the people against the vicious rich; another good hearted prostitute who doubles as a midwife when Veronica has her baby during a blitz; another canteen worker from the upper classes who succumbs to the excitement of the war and finds herself with child, much to the dismay of the honest councillor who was expecting to marry her; another profiteer who cheats on the cement he puts into the bomb shelters, and so on.

A diffuse and scattered series of adventures, it seems to me, which Elia Kazan's staging has been unable to pull together, though he plainly has worked hard with them.

A crowded group of not particularly interesting characters which the actors find it difficult to project through a maze of dialects and makeups.

Cast Works Hard

Walter Hampden gives the good canon a benediction of good intentions and a straightforward performance. Ruth Gordon, a little doubtful of just what her pregnant heroine would do under the trying circumstances Mr. Carroll has given her, works valiantly to make the lady real.

However, I submit that it is pretty difficult to create credibility and sympathy for a young woman who virtually walks into the action, faces the hero, and says: "I'm a ruined woman; what do you know!"

Margot Grahame, she of the flaming mane and the earnest manner, plays the heart-of-gold harlot with good vitality; Art Smith is a defiant communist to his own and the fellow travelers' satisfaction; Colin Keith-Johnston is as honest as maybe as the hero-warden; Philip Bourneuf does what he can for a conscientious objector and there are a half dozen short parts well played, including those by Tom Tully, Ralph Cullinan and Ruth Vivian.

Good settings by Howard Bay and a modest but effective bombing by experts in that line.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
May 20, 1942

War in Scotland

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

OUT of his experience of the blitz in Scotland and his memory of various stencils in the theater, Paul Vincent Carroll has written his newest play. There are moments of emotional intensity in "The Strings, My Lord, Are False," as well as the earnestness of purpose and gift for striking prose that invariably brighten Mr. Carroll's dramas. But it is distinctly a work in his lesser vein and it certainly is not helped by the somewhat stuffy performance of Walter Hampden in the important central role. Here once again those of us who have so admired "Shadow and Substance" and "The White Steed" and have hailed their author as one of the important writing men of the day must leave the theater deeply disappointed. Attempting to tell us a moving tale of simple men and women in war, he has provided something diffuse, familiar and ineffectual.

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It is, in truth, remarkable that Mr. Carroll has succeeded in injecting so many regulation characters and episodes into his drama. To begin with, there are his two favorite figures, the compassionate, understanding priest and the intolerant, narrow prelate who is his superior by church law but not by moral worth. In addition, you will find the noble prostitute, the embittered pacifist who turns hero in the last act, the selfish profiteer, the noisy but valiant little radical, the rather symbolical Jewish wanderer, the baby born during the air raid, the good girl whose moral fiber has been weakened by the horror of war, the heroic telephone girl, the priest's faithful old servant, the brave child in the air-raid shelter and the half-maddened religious fanatic. They are all strewn about so liberally and they behave so according to custom that at times "The Strings, My Lord, Are False" seems an anthology rather than a play.

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That most characteristic phenomenon of our time, the air raid, is in the sad nature of things inescapably impressive in the theater, and thus Mr. Carroll's new play does have its harrowing minutes. Likewise, since the distinguished Irishman is a man of talent, even in his most disappointing efforts, the current work has scenes that are sharply effective. What he has to say, though, is vaguely and rather aimlessly offered. In a way what he is portraying is the reverse of Mr. Steinbeck's anti-Nazi message. "The Moon Is Down" tells us that the Nazi code is evil, even though some of its representatives are admirable men. Mr. Carroll is pointing out that the cause of the United Nations is good, even though some of its agents are corrupt and selfish. In the end, he says, the men of good will in all lands will rise and conquer, and, while it is a fine enough message, it is here embodied in a clumsy play.

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The author of "The Strings, My Lord, Are False" is always at his best in picturing mellow and heroic churchmen and he has portrayed his Canon Courtenay with affection and pride. In Mr. Hampden's hands, however, the mellowness, the humor and the warm humanity of the man fade out and a curiously cold and pompous priest is substituted. Somehow he seemed neither Irish nor Catholic. Miss Ruth Gordon, too, is far from at home as the unhappy girl in the embarrassing condition, giving what must be her first completely ineffective performance. Considerably happier is Miss Margot Grahame in the routinely familiar role of the noble prostitute, although the best portrait of the evening is contributed by Art Smith, who brings life and gusto to the part of the scrappy Scots radical. Will Lee appears as the symbolical Jew who seems to have wandered in by mistake from an Odets play. "The Strings, My Lord, Are False" is just another disappointment.

NEW YORK TIMES
May 20, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"The Strings, My Lord, Are False"

PAUL VINCENT CARROLL worked in a rescue squad in Glasgow's Clydeside during the air attacks, and out of that experience came the play called "The Strings, My Lord, Are False." In it he is again stating the case for the little man, his courage and tolerance and charity: the man who has lost his home and possessions, but is continuing undaunted on his way in a tacit understanding of humanity. After a run in Dublin, where it opened last March, the play arrived last evening at the Royale Theatre, under the auspices of Edward Choate, and with such people as Walter Hampden and Ruth Gordon in the cast.

Once again, Mr. Carroll's leading character is the kindly priest, in this case Canon Courtenay, who is protecting his flock as well as he may from death delivered from an enemy above and from mismanagement and dishonesty contributed by more local sources. As in other Carroll plays, the Canon finds himself opposed by a Church formalism, which suggests that he stick to more ecclesiastical matters than trying to bring decency to some of the members of the town council. Canon Courtenay has quite a task in "The Strings, My Lord, Are False," for it is pretty diffuse and his jobs are many.

Obviously deeply impressed by the people of the Clyde in the Spring of 1941, Mr. Carroll pays tribute to their calm inability to admit they are downed—and events proved they weren't—to their charity and to their respect for one another. But he also mixes up this sincere tribute with various things—the baby expected because-I-didn't-know-what-I-was-doing, the man who, like The Wookey a bit earlier, got into the war because he, personally, had been affected by a bomb. What often is moving is interrupted too much by incidents that obviously are parts of a performance in a theatre.

The action takes place in St. Bride's Church, where the Canon gives sanctuary to all who need it. Councilor Bill Randall is the warden, and a sort of chief of staff to the priest. Passing between them and under their care are the neighbors—Louis Lievens, who lost an arm at Dunkirk and who used to be an engineer; Councilor McPearkie, who runs a store and a black bourse on the side and who represents one of the forces of temporal evil; Ted Bogle, who will teach his child no religion until she is 14 and will then let her decide for herself. They all come into shelter during an air attack, they all have problems—and good cheer and courage.

Walter Hampden is the Canon, impressive, kindly and human when the script will allow him calmness. Ruth Gordon has the part of Iris Ryan, who runs the canteen and is in love with Councilor Randall but who is betrayed elsewhere. To Will Lee and Art Smith have gone two of the better roles—the Louis who declines to hold a new-born baby (there is one of those) because "I am an engineer"; and Ted Bogle, the flamboyant believer in the "International." Colin Keith-Johnston is Councilor Randall, who decides, incidentally, to forgive and forget the past; and Margot Grahame, Tom Tully and Hale Norcross have other roles played for the most part well. Elia Kazan has directed, some scenes beautifully, others with a flurry.

L. N.